

1)Introduction

We represent a growing group of citizens from Bridgewater, Roxbury and Washington who are concerned about our Board of Education's plan for an Agri/STEM program and facility at Shepaug Regional High School. Our purpose is to ensure that the available resources, both from the State and local towns, are utilized to provide superior educational results and facilities for Region 12 students. The current plan lacks the flexibility a 21st Century education demands. Additionally, it exposes the citizens of the Region to significant financial risk for years to come. Our group has spent considerable time and effort in researching this issue and wants to make you aware of our findings.

II) The Facts:**A) Promotion by the BOE**

The Region employed the services of a professional public relations firm to promote the Agri/STEM concept to the voters. The material they prepared, presented in many forms, substantially and significantly misrepresented the facts. Based on these misrepresentations, outlined below, the voters approved the plan.

The Region's Superintendent, at every public hearing, stated that acceptance of this program was the only option left, other than closing the school. That statement is untrue and promoted fear. It also, implied that the Superintendent and BOE were "saviors" of a kind that had created a plan to save the school. No other options were presented to the voters.

This plan includes such “necessities” as an indoor riding ring, equestrian center and new tennis courts.

B) Projected student enrollment.

The financial projections presented by the Region stated that 196 students, from out of district towns, would be required for the project to “break even”. However, a promotional mailer from a member of the BOE, and mailed just before the vote, said that only 49 students were necessary and if adopted, the program would “pay for itself”. Furthermore, a query of the 6 catchment towns designated for sending students to Shepaug reveals that at present, the number of students attending Nonnewaug’s Ag/Science program in all four grades is only 54 students, 142 short of the 196 needed to break even.

Following are the specific numbers from each sending town with their BOE phone numbers for verification:

| | | | |
|---------------|----|----------|--------------|
| Brookfield | 6 | students | 203-775-7700 |
| Danbury | 10 | students | 203-797-4713 |
| New Fairfield | 7 | students | 203-312-5770 |
| New Milford | 22 | students | 860-355-8406 |
| Newtown | 8 | students | 203-426-7600 |
| Sherman | 1 | student | 860-355-3793 |

All of the sending towns, except Danbury, are experiencing declining student populations and have not committed to send additional students to Shepaug’s Agri/STEM program. Danbury stated that they can easily, and gladly, absorb their STEM middle school students into the AP courses at Danbury High School. .

C) Lack of Compliance with State BOE requirements.

To date, the conditions set forth by the State BOE concerning the full approval of Region 12’s Agri/STEM application have not been met. Most importantly, this includes condition #2 which states:

“Regional School District 12 obtains agreements from sending towns’ local boards of education, signed by the town and local Board of Education expressing they are willing to increase the number of students they send to Regional School District 12 above their 3-year average they currently support at Regional School District 14”. (Subsection (b) of Connecticut General Statute 10-65).

According to a telephone conversation on 1/27/16 with Deputy Commissioner of Education, Ellen Cohn, this condition has not been met.

D) NEED

There presently are two Agri/STEM program centers at high schools within a 10-mile radius of Shepaug. It would be much less expensive, and have a significantly better chance of success, by planning to improve our educational standards plus adopt a STEM program within our existing footprint and avoid this huge capital expenditure. Does this, or really any other public high school in a state with a \$500,000,000.00 deficit need an equestrian center, indoor riding ring and new tennis courts? After the local tax payers contribute their 30% share of the \$40,000,000.00 project, what funds are available, or are they willing to expend, to keep up the facility? The plan also puts the elementary schools in each town at risk for any future funding.

E) Conclusions

1) There is no evidence that Region 12 either needs or can support this proposition. Funding of this plan by the state closes out all other alternatives and removes any chance, for the next twenty-five years, for Region 12 to invest in any advances in education.

2) The Shepaug campus was built to accommodate 1,000 students (181,000 square feet) and currently serves about half that number. The Agri/STEM addition of 64,000 square feet would serve only about 30 Region 12 students with the majority coming from out of the Region. This has the effect of making Region 12 taxpayers subsidize the out of region students for the next quarter of a century.

E) Statistics & Demographics

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the “natural increase” in births over deaths is rapidly declining in Connecticut, down 24% in the past three years. They attribute this loss to younger people moving to large urban centers, New York, San Francisco, Seattle, but mostly to the age of females. They’re postponing marriage and making decisions to not have babies as they grow older. These numbers bode ill for supporting a program like the proposed Agri/STEM for Shepaug. All of the catchment towns proposed have declining student populations, with the exception of Danbury which has its own STEM plans.

F)ALTERNATIVES

Last year’s testing of Shepaug 11th grade students showed strength in English (87% reached Mastery Level) and revealed weakness in math (51% Mastery level) and science (57% Mastery level).

In order to re-claim the reputation of excellence at Shepaug, we would advocate for an approach that would benefit a much larger percentage of students in the region at a significantly lower cost. The architects hired by the region to design the new facilities estimate that to enlarge and update the science labs at Shepaug is **\$3 million**. This project would qualify for a **32 percent** state grant. Thus the state would be paying

approximately \$2,000,000.00 not \$28,000,000.00. That's approximately 6% of the State's deficit going to about 30 students in one small school district.

We propose:

a) Invest **\$1 million** of state funding for science lab improvements

vs. \$28 million for Agri/STEM.

b) Invest **\$2 million** of local funding for science lab improvements

vs. \$11.7 million for Agri/STEM.

Please vote **YES** for **(212-0025 A/EC)** – Renovate & improve Region 12 science labs

Please vote **NO** on **(212-0026 VA/N)** the Agri/STEM proposal for Region 12.

Ed Wainwright
Loy Wilkinson
Doug Delisle
Regina Delisle
David Sposato
Bob Brown
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Jay Kronfeld
Kelly Lott
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Bill Holland, Sr.
Patricia Holland
Joe Abdella
Cindy Bennett
Sharon Wimberly
Jim Rooney

Region 12 Ag/STEM requires **196** out of region students to break even.

Today the proposed catchment districts send 54 Ag students to Nonnewaug.

That is a total of 54 students in grades 9 thru 12.

Last year Dr. Donna Wentzell , Commissioner of Education wrote:

“Enrollment in CT Ag/science centers increased by 18% in 10 years”

Starting with 108 students and 18% growth every 10 years:

In **36** years Shepaug Ag/Stem program may reach **196** out of district students.

If Shepaug survives:

In 2015 cost per student in Region 12 is **\$28,271** (twice the state average).

On August 4, 2015 CT State BOE set two conditions which have **not** been met:

#2 Sending catchment districts are willing to increase their enrollment above the historical 3 year average at Nonnewaug.

#4 Submission minutes of meetings discussing programmatic activities, agricultural pathways, sequence of courses.

A Superior Alternative exists:

1. Renovate and extend the science laboratories.
2. Run an aggressive STEM program for all students.

Facts:

January 2016 -demographer's report shows **250** students not in public school.

Architectural estimate for science lab renovation/extension is **\$3** million.

This renovation qualifies for **32%** state aid.

Recommendation:

Invest **\$1** million in state money vs. **\$28** million for Ag/STEM.

Invest **\$2** million in local money vs. **\$11.7** million for Ag/STEM.

Vote **NO** on the proposed Region 12 Shepaug Ag/STEM (212-0026 VA/N)

Vote **YES** on Region 12 Science lab renovation (212-0025 A/EC)